

WALKING STICKS



One important aspect of walking tall is keeping the shoulders over the hips and not leaning forward. Arm swings are useful to walking tall and gait, too; they provide extra forward momentum. Walking sticks are props that you can use to cue participants to walk with more lifted, upright torsos. You will find that both the weight and length of walking sticks are useful for facilitating arm swings and upright posture. Walking sticks also help participants feel the proprioceptive and balance differences that occur when they use upright posture and arm swings.

Benefits »

- ⦿ Encourages upright posture with abs braced and ribs lifted.
- ⦿ Facilitates arm swings and forward momentum.
- ⦿ Engages inner senses of balance.
- ⦿ Helps participants look ahead rather than down.

Set It Up »

You'll need a few pairs of walking sticks; participants can take turns. One brand is called Exerstriders. I have also used the inexpensive bamboo sticks that you can buy at the beach. They aren't perfect, but they'll work to make your point.

How to Do It »

Teach participants how to use the walking sticks properly. The technique to use is a simple alternating motion. With each arm swing they reach out with the pole and tap it lightly on the ground as they move toward it and past it. Meanwhile they'll bring the other stick forward to tap the ground with it. It's a reciprocal motion between arms and legs, similar to planting ski poles: Reach, tap, and go by. Reach, tap, and go by. Practice yourself before class if you are unfamiliar.

Hands Low

- ⦿ Ask participants to place their hands on walking sticks at waist height. This low-hands position is common among seniors, especially when walking with canes or walkers.
- ⦿ Invite them to walk across the room 8 to 10 feet (2.5-3 meters). As they walk across the room, talk with them about how this feels.
 - Can they feel a slight forward bend in their posture? (Yes, when their hands are low and in front.)
 - Can they sense that the stick takes some of their forward weight? (Provides some support.)
 - Ask them to remember how this hand position felt throughout their body.



Hands High

- ⦿ Participants place their hands on the walking sticks at shoulder height.
- ⦿ Repeat the walk across the room.
 - Try to walk a little taller, keeping your shoulders over your hips, abs braced, ribs lifted, eyes forward, and head retracted.
 - With your hands higher, can you feel how holding the poles higher helps support your effort to walk tall?
 - Is walking upright a little easier?
 - Is this position easier on your back?
 - Can you feel that the walking sticks help lift your torso into a taller position?
 - Walk across the room again, this time using your tall, ribs-lifted posture and keeping your eyes on the horizon.
 - How does that feel? Do you notice a difference walking with ribs lifted?
 - Were the walking sticks helpful?



Walk With Arm Swings

- ⦿ Take the walking sticks away.
- ⦿ Discuss what arm swings can add to gait (i.e., momentum for forward motion, help in bringing the next leg forward).
- ⦿ Ask them to walk tall again across the room. Tell them that as they walk this time, you want them to use big, exaggerated arm swings and see if they feel any differences.
 - Walk tall and create big arm swings.
 - Keep elbows bent at 90 degrees.
 - With each arm swing, lift your hands to about shoulder height—the same height where you held the stick in Hands High.
 - Do big arm swings. Be careful, but do your best!
 - Can you feel the *talling* effect of arm swings?
 - What else do you notice?
 - Rhythm and flow?
 - Lift?
 - Speed?
 - Forward momentum?
 - Grace? We can hope!



Keep It Safe »

Participants should never lean on the poles for balance support. Inexpensive walking sticks do not have a solid rubber stop on their ends, which means they could slide if leaned on and so are not particularly safe.

Live It »

Participants can give their stride a little lift with walking sticks. Walking tall and using arm swings feels good and helps lift their gaze. It improves their posture, is better for the back, and keeps them moving forward.